



WISCONSIN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

K-12 Teacher Licensing in Wisconsin

An individual teaching in a Wisconsin public school, including a charter school, or in a school or institution operated by a county or the state, must hold a license or a permit issued by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). The 2015-17 Biennial Budget Act, 2015 Wisconsin Act 55 (“the budget act”), alters several aspects of teacher licensing in Wisconsin. This Information Memorandum describes the changes in the budget act to K-12 teacher licensing in Wisconsin.

CURRENT MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR TEACHING LICENSES

Subject to specific statutory limitations, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction is authorized to establish attainment and examination standards for teachers and to promulgate rules regulating teacher licensing. [s. 115.28 (7), Stats.] The Superintendent is also authorized to set standards for and approve teacher preparation programs. Procedures for teacher licensing are controlled by DPI administrative rules. [ch. PI 34, Wis. Adm. Code.] Chapter PI 34 provides requirements for three stages of licenses for teachers: (1) an initial educator license; (2) a professional educator license; and (3) a master educator license. Chapter PI 34 also provides standards for approved programs at higher educational institutions that prepare professional school personnel.

Generally, an applicant for teacher licensure in Wisconsin must possess a bachelor’s degree and must have completed an approved teacher preparation program, although there are some limited exceptions to these requirements for teaching specific subjects. [s. 118.19 (3) (a), Stats.] For example, a trade specialist permit to teach industrial arts subjects is available to applicants who complete an apprenticeship and three years of practical experience beyond apprenticeship. [s. 118.19 (7), Stats.] Likewise, an applicant with a bachelor’s degree in engineering, music, art, foreign language, computer science, math, or science and five years of experience in the subject may obtain a professional teaching permit by completing an alternative teacher preparation program. [s. 118.192, Stats.]

The curriculum of a teacher preparation program must include certain statutorily required elements, such as training in minority group relations, Native American culture and tribal sovereignty, conflict resolution, student teaching, and phonics. [s. 118.19, Stats.] Under DPI rules, the programs must also include training in the Wisconsin Teacher Standards, which require demonstration of content knowledge in the subject matter taught and demonstration of pedagogical proficiency, among other things. [s. PI 34.02, Wis. Adm. Code.]

In order to qualify for a Wisconsin educator license, a candidate must demonstrate subject area competency through a standardized assessment. No waiver is available for the requirement to

obtain a passing score on subject area tests for the relevant licensure areas. The requirement for a subject area test applies to anyone who completes an educator preparation program or returns to complete a new licensure area (to teach a new subject) after August 31, 2004.

DPI has established several options for an applicant to prove satisfactory completion of the licensure requirements, referred to as “pathways to licensure.”¹ For example, in some situations, an applicant may demonstrate content knowledge or pedagogical proficiency through experience. Currently, DPI recognizes eight different pathways to licensure.²

THE 2015-17 BIENNIAL BUDGET ACT

The budget act approves all teacher preparatory programs that are accredited by “a regional or national institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. department of education” or by “a programmatic accrediting organization.” This means DPI must approve teacher preparatory programs with such accreditation for purposes of granting a license to teach. Likewise, the budget act requires DPI to accept credits from any institution of higher education, as defined in federal law, for purposes of renewing a license to teach.

The budget act creates additional alternative pathways to obtain a state teaching license or permit, described in detail in the sections below.

LICENSES TO TEACH TECHNICAL EDUCATION SUBJECTS

License based on technical college certification

The budget act allows DPI to issue a permit to teach industrial arts subjects in a public school to an applicant if he or she is certified by the technical college system board to teach an industrial arts or similar subject.

License based on point system

The budget act requires DPI to issue a three-year initial teaching license to teach technical education subjects, including technology education and any technology-related occupation, to an applicant who passes a background check and does both of the following: (1) earns a minimum score on a point system created by the budget act; and (2) “agrees to complete a curriculum determined by the school board of the district in which the [applicant] would teach.” The system assigns points both for experience in a technical field and for pedagogical experience.³ An applicant must score a minimum of 25 points in each of these two categories, and must earn a total score of at least 100.

¹ Although commonly referred to as “pathways to licensure,” two of the pathways lead to teaching permits (either the professional teaching permit or the trade specialist permit) rather than teaching licenses. A clear distinction between the terms “license” and “permit” is not provided in statute, but it is DPI’s position that a license generally requires completion of an approved teacher preparation program, while a permit does not. [See the DPI Educator Licensing Online Frequently Asked Questions page available at <http://tepd.dpi.wi.gov/licensing/elo-faqs#Permit>.]

² For more information about the pathways to licensure, see the pathways to licensure page available at <http://tepd.dpi.wi.gov/licensing/pathways-to-licensure>.

³ For example, the point system assigns an applicant 90 points in the first category (experience in a technical field) for industry certification; it awards 100 points in the second category (pedagogical experience) for a bachelor’s degree in technical or technology education.

An applicant for a technical education teaching license may receive points for possessing a bachelor's degree but is not required to possess one to obtain a license. DPI is required to verify the applicant's qualifications. The budget act defines acceptable forms of proof for this verification.

Finally, if DPI does not approve or deny an application for this type of technical education license within 45 business days, the application is presumptively approved until DPI acts.

LICENSES BASED ON RECIPROCITY

Under the budget act, DPI must issue an initial license to teach or an administrator license to an individual who meets the following conditions:

- Passes a background check;
- Holds an equivalent license, in good standing, in another state;
- Worked as a teacher or administrator under such license for at least one year in another state; and
- Has received a job offer for a teacher or administrator position in Wisconsin.

DPI determines the subjects and grades that a teacher applicant for a reciprocity license will be licensed to teach in Wisconsin, based on the nature of the equivalent license and experience.

LICENSES TO TEACH IN MONTESSORI SCHOOLS

Under the budget act, DPI must issue an initial license to teach in schools using the Montessori method as their primary method of instruction to an eligible individual. An individual is eligible for this license if he or she meets the following conditions:

- Passes a background check;
- Possesses a bachelor's degree;
- Successfully completes a teacher education accredited by the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education;
- Successfully completes an introductory course worth at least three postsecondary credits in special education;
- Passes certain qualifying standardized examinations.

Such a license authorizes the individual to teach the educational levels he or she has trained for under the qualifying Montessori-approved teacher education program.

This memorandum is not a policy statement of the Joint Legislative Council or its staff.

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